Reviewer's report

Title: Beyond the Clinic: Improving Child Health through Evidence-based Community Development

Version: 3 Date: 9 May 2013

Reviewer: Abbey Byrne

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer Report

The findings presented in Figure 2 and the Additional files are strengths of the paper providing a usable and accessible summary of the evidence for policy makers, health care providers and community stakeholders. Through such, the authors have succeeded in the objective of the paper.

The work also holds great value through the techniques employed to disseminate the findings to relevant stakeholders for likely application of the evidence in a practical sense.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The second rationalisation for the inclusion of only systematic reviews and meta-analyses carries a significant assumption: systematic reviews may represent the pinnacle in of the levels of evidence only if they are undertaken with rigour and, through such, report on high quality primary research from which findings can be taken with confidence. However, a methodology for quality appraisal of the included literature is not shown and appears not to have been undertaken. Critical appraisal, beyond the classification of the strength of evidence, is essential to consider the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn from the systematic reviews and meta-analyses. It is recommended that this paper be revised to assess the methodological quality of included studies. The authors may wish apply of an established critical appraisal tool, for instance AMSTAR or other as selected by the authors.

Minor Essential Revisions

2. The data of magnitude of effect is not shown in text or in Additional files. The authors are requested to present the actual effect stated by the included meta-analyses, extending from current presentation of the categorisation as large, medium or small effect.

3. The Additional files exclude the three strategies identified with sufficient evidence to be ineffective or deleterious, as stated on page 11, paragraph 2. Do the authors have a particular reason for the omission? From the reviewers perspective this evidence is important for policy makers, health care providers and community stakeholders for avoidance of such approaches in the future. It is recommended that this content is added to the Additional files.

4. The paper provides little detail on the methodology employed. Is the work
grounded in a systematic approach? The paper should inform on: the specific date (‘present’ must be defined); search terms used; inclusion and exclusion criteria; process by which relevant literature was sorted.

5. Please revise several points of terminology: identification of ethnicities using African American and Caucasian rather than black and white throughout the paper; the 'U.S.' in full words in paragraph 1 of the Introduction section

Discretionary Revisions

6. The abstract would be more appropriate if it stated the country of focus, and if the results section offered a snapshot of key findings or in the least the strategies that were found to be most effective.

7. The initial two sentences of the Methods section would be more suitably placed as the final paragraph of the Introduction section.

8. In excluding primary research from the review the study risks overlooking highly effective, new and potentially innovative community approaches to child wellbeing and development. This limitation should be acknowledged within the Discussion section.

9. In reference to the final sentence of the Methods section, please clarify if the point “If a study failed to report quantitative estimates” is exclusively referring to systematic reviews that did not incorporate a meta-analysis and therefore did not report a pooled quantitative estimation of effect? If so, these studies did not so much ‘fail’ to report quantitative estimate. This sentence could be rephrased.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.